



People attending the "Human Rights in the Virgin Islands: Why Does it Matter?" forum, at the Divi Carina Bay Resort and Casino on Tuesday, listen during the panel presentations.

Human rights and health care

VI Perinatal Inc. sponsors forum to address issues

TOM EADER

ST. CROIX — Virgin Islands Perinatal Inc. (VIPI) — a community-based organization which assists low-income, uninsured families gain access to primary health care — hosted a community forum Tuesday at Divi Carina Bay Resort and Casino.

Approximately 50 Virgin Islanders were tasked with the challenge to answer one question, "Human Rights in the Virgin Islands: Why does it matter?"

The purpose of the community forum was to provide individuals with an opportunity to come together and share ideas pertaining to primary health care and human rights issues.

The forum is just the beginning of a grassroots movement to address the status of health care that is provided to citizens living in the Virgin Islands as it relates to basic human-rights issues.

Human rights are the basic rights individuals typically take for granted. On Dec. 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control," according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The community forum included guest speaker Byllye Avery, a



Kristin Duncan

Elise Donovan, deputy director of the International Affairs Secretariat in the British Virgin Islands, speaks during her BVI Human Rights Experience presentation during the "Human Rights in the Virgin Islands: Why Does it Matter?" forum at the Divi Carina Bay Resort and Casino on Tuesday.

human rights activist and author who is founder and president of the Avery Institute for Social Change, as well as founder of the National Black Women's Health Project.

While addressing the audience during her keynote address, Avery said she wanted her audience to learn about the importance of human rights. She emphasized how health care is a basic human right. While some individuals might think health care should only be available to individuals who can afford to purchase it, Avery said health care is something that everybody deserves simply by being born.

"Every single person deserves to have good health care," she said.

Considering the Virgin Islands is preparing for its fifth constitutional convention to create a constitution that would replace the Revised Organic Act of 1954, Avery said she thinks it's very important for women's voices and perspectives to be involved in that process. She encouraged the women who participated in the community forum to use their power to bring about change.

"We want to get them [women] ready so that they can participate in this process," she said about the fifth constitutional convention.

The community forum also consisted of a panel discussion during the afternoon with three guest panelists — Elise Donovan, deputy director of the International Affairs Secretariat in the British Virgin Islands; Carlyle Corbin, international advisor on governance at the University of the Virgin Islands and Barbara Jackson, VIPI executive director.

During the panel discussion, Donovan talked about the human rights experience in the British Virgin Islands. Corbin focused his discussion on the constitutional convention, addressing various human rights implications. Jackson discussed health care as a human rights issue.

Donovan said the British Virgin Islands has been working toward establishing a constitution for the past couple years with a major focus on human rights.

"This whole process is about education, and educating people about their rights and what is important," she said.

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2007, NO. 060

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